WHIRRAKEE

January/February 2008 Vol. 29 No. 1

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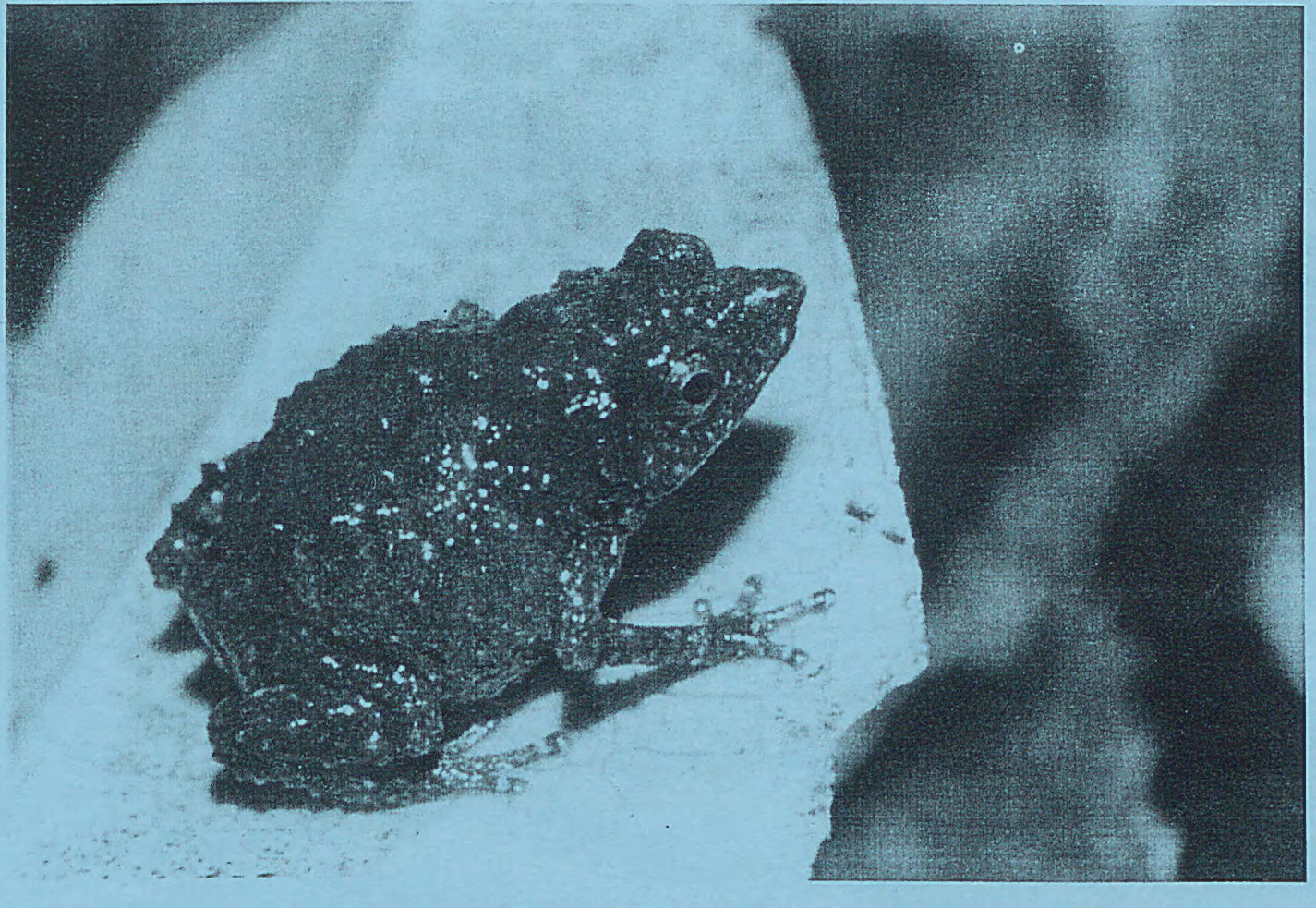

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
ISSN 0812-423X

Office Bearers for 2007 - 2008

President	Glenise Moors	Mandurang South Road, Sedgwick	54396254
Senior Vice President	Richard Goonan		0423 418815
Junior Vice President	Matthew Comer		0409 162627
Secretary	Anne Bridley		5449 3479
Minute Secretary	Peter Ellis and Jan Orr		
Treasurer	Stuart Fraser	12 Bambara Close, Bendigo	
Membership Officer	Anne Bridley		5449 3479
Excursion organiser	Richard Goonan		0423 418815
Syllabus organiser	Rod Orr	2 Cockerel Court, Bendigo	5443 5668
	(an assistant's position for the syllabus organiser is still vacant)		
Librarian (t.b.c.)	Diana Collier	31 Milroy Street, Bendigo	5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Matthew Comer		0409 162 627
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis (assisted by Bill Holsworth and Kath Thompson)		0407 427179
Whirrakee contact	Sabine Wilkens	82 Somerville Street, Bendigo	5443 2797
		e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Bob Ruddick, Rod Orr, Jan Orr, Peter Ellis, Ben Goonan, Anthony Sheean, Rob Moors

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active group that meets regularly (the Fauna Study Group) and other groups that meet at irregular intervals.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: This group has field excursions and the occasional lecture evening. Please consult the *Whirrakee* for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.
To propose meetings or excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 29, No. 1, January/February 2008

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
Welcome back to the New Year. The Club usually marks the occasion by encouraging members to bring slides of recent or past nature adventures to share with the rest of us. I had a few of those last year, and I have written one of these up in this 'Whirrakee' – of course, this is always an option for you as well. Looking back on those travelling times brings back such good memories. Looking at the President's report for 2006/2007 also brings back memories, of past activities and interesting things we have learnt. It is a dizzying list, and it is hard to believe how the relatively few active members actually did all those things. If you are a member, and have not been so active last year, why not put your hand up and get a bit more involved?

Front Page Illustration – Photographer: Stephen Richards
Having a species named after you is many a biologist's dream. This beautiful little frog has been named *Choerophryne burtoni*, in honour of Tom Burton's contribution to the field of frog systematics. Read all about it on page 4.

President's Annual Report (2006/07) – Glenise Moors.

Members of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club have enjoyed a year filled with a wide variety of activities. Rod Orr has continued to organize informative monthly guest speakers. In October, Frances Cincotta described central Victorian peas and explained how to use her identification key. In November, Victor Hurley spoke about the plight of the Major Mitchell Cockatoos, in particular the loss of aging habitat trees. Following our December dinner, Jill MacFarlane gave an illustrated talk on the wildlife of the Galapagos Islands. 2007 started with the traditional members' slides – now including digital images. In March, Leigh Mitchell explained frog monitoring in our region. Ben Goonan spoke about North Central Roadside Conservation at the April meeting. In May, we were informed of the surveying and conservation guidelines on the alignment of the Bendigo-Ballarat 'Super Pipe', by Earthtec and Flora and Fauna representatives. Andrew Pritchard described the research into the Thynnine wasps as pollinators of threatened forms of Caladenia when he spoke in June. In July, David Major from Parks Victoria spoke on the importance of the Greater Bendigo National Park. Jane Cleary presented a fascinating talk on Biblical Plants at the August meeting and in September, Glenise Moors presented natural history images of a recent trip to northern Queensland.

In March, a new monthly segment entitled 'Thing of the Night" was introduced. This is a 10 minute session concentrating on local natural history. Firstly, we had Treecreepers (Brown and White-throated) by Glenise Moors followed by Local Autumn/Winter Orchids by Rod Orr; Ecological Vegetation Classes of One Tree Hill by Richard Goonan; Westringias (*W. eremicola* and *W. crassifolia*) by Matthew Comer; Eucalypts (*E. microcarpa* and *E. tricarpa*) and their response to wet times by Stuart Fraser; and Graptolites by Peter Ellis.

This year Richard Goonan organized many varied and informative excursions. These included Roadside Conservation with Ben Goonan, Barmah (general), Campaspe River (landscape changes and invertebrates), Mt Alexander Regional Park (ecology), Kamarooka (general), Waste Water Plant and Whipstick (birds), Wellsford Forest (Swift Parrot survey), Kamarooka and Campaspe area with Phil Dyson (geology and hydrology), Blackwood, jointly with Field Naturalists Club of Victoria (fungi), Mt Alexander (weed infestations), and Local Vegetation Survey of areas affected by fuel reduction burns.

Over the past year, members have represented our club at community and inter-club activities. These were a tree-planting day with Laurel Street Primary School, the 'Go Fish' campaign at Kennington Reservoir, Mid-Murray FNC birthday dinner, South-Eastern Australia Naturalists Association (SEANA) committee and camp-outs, led Friends of Cranbourne Botanic Gardens excursion locally, advised on fauna habitat at Crusoe Reservoir, conducted bird surveys including those for the Swift Parrot and the twice yearly surveys at the Epsom treatment plant, participated in a tree planting weekend for the regent honeyeater at Lurg, spoke on bird-watching at the Latrobe Visual Arts, 'Bird in the Hand' exhibition, participated in Spring in the Bendigo Bush committee involving Wattle Day and the Gardener's Workshop. In May, our club was recognized by the Uniting Churches group as community volunteers.

Our club and, in particular, Rod and Jan Orr, were presented with certificates of appreciation for their work towards preserving endangered orchids in Victoria. The national Banksia Award was presented to Victoria for their project 'Back from the Brink'. More recently, a combined excursion helped search for the Crimson Spider Orchid locally.

Individual members were involved in the latest joint production of Indigenous Plants of Bendigo. The CD-Rom 'Plants and Animals

of the Box-Ironbark Area of Central Victoria' and our publications on orchids, eucalypts, spiders and birds are frequently promoted as valuable educational aids.

Matthew Comer has continued to organize the maintenance of the clubs' garden with regular working bees supported by small groups of members who carried out weeding, mulching and additional planting. The fauna group met occasionally for informal discussions and slides, and helped survey the Flora Hill Cluster learning centre at Mandurang south for fauna. The club library has been maintained by Dianna Collier, with the addition of books from the collection of Bill Perry, and the implementation of a new improved borrowing system. Maurie Lewis and Darren White managed the hall effectively once again, with a high usage rate by other groups. The high standards of hall maintenance have also continued. Sabine Wilkens continued to produce the *Whirrakee* to a good standard every month without fail, backed up by the *Whirrakee* folding team.

Members of the club were involved in a number of local issues and causes during the year, which involved various efforts such as writing submissions and letters, attending meetings or workshops and lobbying politicians. These issues included the proposed Huntly landfill, the Jackass Flat residential plan, the river red gum forests investigation, to which numerous club members made submissions, the campaign to add the Wellsford forest to the Greater Bendigo National Park, proposed tree removal by VicRoads on the Castlemaine-Maldon road, the new forest management plan for the region, the fire operations plan and fuel reduction burning, meetings regarding the possible ring road for Bendigo, the pink-tailed worm-lizard, input into the idea of a museum for Bendigo and bulldozing of roadside vegetation on the Eaglehawk-Neiborough road.

Thankyou to all the people who carried out these activities throughout the year and to the office bearer's, committee members and all those who contributed through many other ways to the club in 2006/07. Hopefully 2008 will be another active and successful year for our club.

Every good frog deserves a name

Author: Antowaan Grbac, informed by Cherie Burton

New species of frogs are frequently discovered in Papua New Guinea, and names have to be thought up for them. Sometimes a newly discovered species is named to honour a herpetologist that has contributed significantly to the knowledge of the frog fauna. One such species is *Choerophryne burtoni,* named in 2007 to honour Dr Thomas Burton of the Bendigo Campus of LaTrobe University - yes, him - "in recognition of his substantial contribution to New Guinea microhylid systematics ..."

The new species belongs to the family Microhylidae, which ranges the tropics, found in Africa, Madagascar, South America, Southern and South-East Asia, and especially in the hot spot that is New Guinea, where over 150 species have been named, and maybe another 100 await description. Despite their name, microhylids are not necessarily small. Specimens of some New Guinea species of the genus *Callulops* would easily fill a bread-and-butter plate. However, many species, including *Choerophryne burtoni,* are tiny. The diagnosis of Microhylidae depends upon internal structures - the shapes of the bones of the breast and back, and the possession of an extra belly muscle. The discovery of this muscle was one of Burton's earliest contributions.

The genus *Choerophryne* consists of five small terrestrial or scansorial (climbing) species found only on New Guinea. They are easily recognizable because of their elongated snouts formed by the projections of two small

bones of the upper jaw. The name "*Choerophryne*" was first coined by an early 20th century Hungarian herpetologist named Mehely, and the artificial "common name" given to these species - "artificial" because no-one on earth actually uses it - is "Mehely Frogs", where Mehely is pronounced, apparently, as "May-hay", so the new species is "Burton's Mehely Frog". "*Choerophryne burtoni*" is pronounced "ker-OFF-rin-ee BUR-ton-eye".

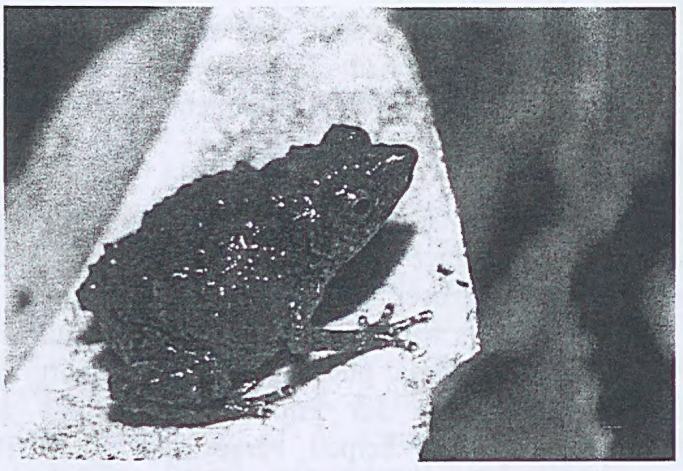
Choerophryne burtoni has been found in only one location in the Kikori Integrated Conservation and Development Project Area in Southern Highlands Province, PNG. It is quite common in its restricted area of steep limestone karst, but although the males make a lot of noise, they are very hard to catch, because they are so small (maximum size about 12.5 mm - half an inch), call from concealed sites like rolled-up leaves, and live in terrain that is riddled with sink-holes, hence difficult and dangerous for humans, especially at the very time the frogs call, i.e., in the dark when it is raining.

It is known to be a new species by differring with the previously named species in the structure of its first finger, the relative length of its legs, and the size of its snout (small by *Choerophryne* standards), and especially by the mating call of the males, which differs in pitch, duration and number of notes per call. Frogs of the new species are a "fleshy orange-brown" with darker patches on the back. The irises of their eyes are orange.

Dr Burton is reported to be "dead chuffed" and rumoured to have opened a bottle of Grange to celebrate with a select few friends.

Reference

Richards, S.J., Dahl, C.S. & Hiaso J. (2007) Another new species of Choerophryne (Anura: Microhylidae) from Southern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea. Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia *131:* 135-141.



This beautiful frog deserves a second appearance...

The Pending Execution of a Local Elder

By Clive Fisher

A huge old mugga ironbark, probably the biggest in Bendigo, is soon to be destroyed in humanity's hunger to "develop" more and more of our natural environment.

This *Eucalyptus sideroxylon* just happens to live in an area sub-divided for development, I am told by the Greater City of Bendigo Council, before the requirement for an Environmental Effects Statement became law.

The sub-divider was the old Housing Commission, but they never got past the planning stage.

I have measured the trunk circumference at chest height, and found it to measure 14 ft 6 ins. It has a large hollow, so it must be well over 100 years old, perhaps only one-fifth into its life-span.

Dale Sampson, I believe it was, of the City Council told me that the Housing Commission had sold it to Villawood, but the

house lots have been advertised for sale in an advertisement posted by Macquarie Homes.

I knew nothing about the ironbark's pending demise until about four months ago, when I saw the earth-moving equipment there.

I promptly went and spoke to the person in charge of the machines and asked if they were going to destroy the biggest mugga ironbark in Bendigo.

He answered in the affirmative, and added, "That's progress.""

"Progress to what?" I rejoined. "The complete destruction of the natural world?"

He agreed that this is what is happening, and added that, "When we destroy all of nature, we will destroy ourselves, because we are a part of nature."

He was either merely paying lip-service to his statement, or he does not have the courage of his convictions.

This magnificent tree has been storing carbon, and removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to release the oxygen chemically combined with the carbon, every day of its life.

At the moment it lives in Ascot Court, which is part of the St James Wood Estate, where a lone southern mahogany (*Eucalyptus botryoides*), a group of Cootamundra wattles (*Acacia baileyana*) and the matted bush-pea (*Pultenaea pedunculata* have already been removed in the name of progress, while some European trees were left, and Manchurian pear planted in the nature strips, in the complete destruction of the Australian flora, and its replacement with exotic plants from the Northern Hemisphere, which seems to be the intention.

I have seen a map of the house lots Ascot Court superimposed on an aerial view of the area, courtesy of the Bendigo Council, and the fence line between two of the house lots runs right through the centre of the ironbark's trunk, so to save it, the fence line will have to be changed.

Can anything be done to stop the destruction of this magnificent ironbark, which is doing a magnificent job of cleaning the air we breathe? The developer told me the execution will take place within two years.
If you have any ideas, contact Clive Fisher at
12 Magpie Street, Bendigo 3550
Tel. 03-54424818.

A visit to Mutawintji National Park

By Sabine Wilkens
(photographer: Carmen Wilkens)

In the last year, I have been twice to this National Park, in May, just for a day to check it out, and the second time in August with my sister (and three daughters between us) who came out to Australia for the first time since I moved here 30 years ago. It was difficult choosing where to take them, obviously there is so much to see, and we only had a few short weeks.
Most Europeans enjoy the outback, and I decided to take them for our first ten days to Lake Mungo and Mutawintji National Park. They are both 'outback' parks, but differ enormously in character.

I only heard of Mutawintji NP early last year, from Bob Aulsebrook, a former lecturer in Photography at LaTrobe University. He told me that he used to take his photography students there, as the surroundings are spectacular and somewhat similar to central Australia (without the vast distance to travel).

The scenery is certainly breathtaking, with brilliant red soils, wide open views from the high ranges, as well steep rocky gorges, like those shown in the photograph overleaf.

several walks begin close to the camping site

The Park is about 130km northeast of Broken Hill, about half way (as the crow flies) between Broken Hill and White Cliffs. Access is mainly on dirt road, but it is in good condition. Nevertheless, it takes a good two hours to get there from Broken Hill and the road is closed during bad weather.

Some of the following information is taken from a tourist brochure for Broken Hill ('Accessible outback', edition 15) and from the leaflet produced by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, who jointly manage the Park with the traditional owners.

Mutawintji National Park is the first national park placed under the guardianship of its traditional owners and the site of one of the best collection of aboriginal rock art in New South Wales. It is the tribal area of the Malyankapa and Pandjikali people. Certain sites were traditionally used for ceremonies like initiations and rainmaking. In the past, over 1000 people might have gathered there for such ceremonies. Today, there is no public access to these special sites, but regular guided tours will take visitors to selected areas within them.

The park is dominated by the Bynguano Range. One of the longer walks, and the highlight of our stay there, takes in this range. Going past the dramatic gorges and the picturesque water holes, it is not hard to see why this was once one of the most important meeting places for Aboriginal people on the continent.

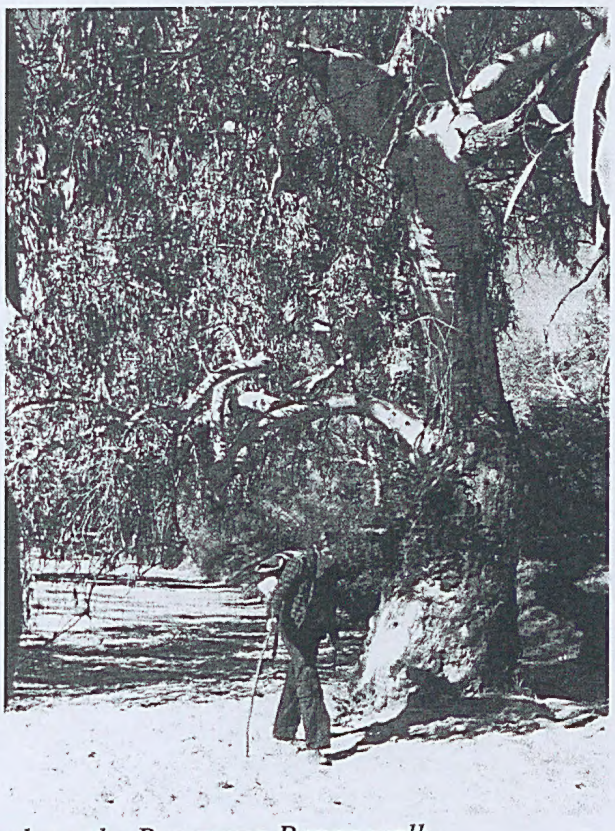
a rewarding end to one of the self-guided walks

Hundreds of ochre outlines of hands and animal paws, some up to 30 000 years old, are stencilled on rock overhangs, and there are many carvings etched into the rock.

The ranges and plains are the eroded remnants of a 400 million year old seabed (sedimentary sandstone rock with some conglomerates and shale layers). The area is of major palaeontological significance, as it is one of the few recognised Devonian fossil localities in NSW.

Much of the Bynguano Range walk is in or alongside dry creek beds, which are lined by impressive and gnarly River Red Gums. In August, there were many wattles and other shrubs in flower. The cypress pines, which often grew in very unpromising sites between boulders, also looked magnificent.

The track is very well-marked and it is hard to imagine how Burke and Wills (who have left evidence of their expedition through this area), could find their way without the little green triangles...and did they have time and inclination to admire the scenery?



along the Bynguano Range walk

Fauna is abundant as they can rely on a reasonable supply of water all year round. A small, isolated population of yellow-footed rock wallaby lives here, an endangered species that was only discovered in 1972 and is the only known population in NSW. On my first visit, I was lucky enough to catch a glimpse of one. Due to the permanent water supply, there are many birds. My family was astounded at the beauty and sheer number of parrots that were everywhere, but many finches and smaller birds are also common. In the campsite, apostlebirds were frequently seen and heard, as they are noisy and not shy.

Apostlebirds are always interesting to watch

Another exciting animal was discovered only a few years ago, a medium sized lizard, the Centralian Ranges Rock Skink, was found amongst the leaf litter close to some boulders. This was the first time the animal has been recorded in NSW, and it remains the only location in the state until today. Other reptiles are easier to see, in fact we saw many different lizards, covering the size range from tiny fast skinks, to those with miniscule legs and a snake-like body, to larger ones as in the photo below.

This impressive dragon kept itself in this perfect position long enough to be photographed from all angles

There are many other self-guided walks, a very spacious camping area, toilets, BBQ and picnic tables. The camping ground also has showers, but this felt like an overindulgence.

The camping fee is relatively high, but definitely worth it. In fact, you get a priceless look at the stars at night. You have to bring your own wood, and, unlike at Lake Mungo NP, you cannot buy firewood from the rangers.
Regular tours are conducted by aboriginal guides to areas closed to the public

From the park, you can get to White Cliffs and back in one day. The road to White Cliffs, as the one to Broken Hill adds to the outback experience of this trip. Along the endless flat paddocks, you can see many emus as well as spectacular patches of flowers.

For us the park came with a complete set of helpful husbands, who wandered, or sat around the campsite, looking for something to do. On the day of our departure, we noticed that we had a flat tyre and did not even get as far as pulling the spare wheel out of the boot, before two gentlemen took over the proceedings, complete with tyre pressure gauge and pump, as well as helpful advice for five girls travelling in the outback.

Find out more about the park at www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au or contact the Broken Hill Area Office of of the National Parks and Wildlife service on 08 80803200

Many of the brilliantly pink/magenta species of Swainsona, were seen on the roadside, on the way back to Broken Hill.

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings

Wednesday, February 13 **7.30pm**
In this first meeting of the year, members usually bring interesting slides to share (not necessarily of their holidays).

Wednesday, March 12 **7.30pm**
Elvyne Hogan, Trust for Nature Regional Manager (North Central) will talk about: 'Northern Plains Grasslands: Going or are we Gaining Ground?
Trust for Nature, Department of Sustainability and Environment and others have been targeting Northern Plains grasslands for protection over the last 10 to 15 years. There have been some exciting times as well as frustrating and many interesting characters involved. Elvyne will give a brief history of what has been happening and how Grasslands have fared over this time as well as a short update on TfN activities.

Excursions
Contact Richard Goonan if you have any comments, questions or ideas for excursions in 2008 (ph 0423418815).

Fauna Group
This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.

Wednesday, February 27 **7.30pm**
Topic for discussion to be determined.

Regular Fauna Excursions
Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30, the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179 or 5442 1813. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone but go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30 then the excursion is not on.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

SEANA Autumn campout 7 - 10 Mar 2008 Naracoorte Caves NP – 1st Notice
Attractions include Caves, rare fossils, viewing southern bent-winged bat wintering colony plus botany, bird and geology tours.
Registration and deposit of $30 to be paid by 20 September.
Total cost probably under $125 includes 3 catered dinners & caves guides.

Australian Naturalists Network (ANN) Get-together 10-18 May 2008
Mary River Park, Northern Territory.
Expression of interest & deposit of $200 was due to NTFNC by 1/10/07.
Accommodation at Mary River Park was to be booked directly by end of October 07.
The **second notice** has been received. This includes an update on accommodation availability at Mary River Park (cabins are essentially full) plus lists of tour operators and natural history references.
Anne Bridley (54493479) has further details